

CHAPTER VII

CONSCIOUSNESS

IN Consciousness and Will—in the faculties of appreciating the points of a question and deciding upon them—Life displays its supremest manifestations. In shaping his behaviour, man has left the instinctive automatism of the insects far behind him. Instinct holds his hand, but is blindfolded, urging rather than guiding him. Habits may cling round him : but they are of his own making. For the rest he is free. It is possible to imagine a machine that would illustrate the working of directive instinct of sensation and reaction—even of reasoning inference. But no mechanism can be imagined that could develop consciousness. that could become aware of itself, or that could spontaneously decide upon the movements of its wheels.

The meaning of consciousness has been obscured by the theories that have grown up around it. We may translate it simply by the term "awareness." In Chapter III we have found some reason for believing that a nerve-cell not only receives an impression and develops a muscular reaction in response, but *feels* or becomes aware of what has passed. The feelings of nerve-cells are no doubt of the vaguest, most shadowy character. But when concentrated in the nerve ganglia they take more substance and definition, and produce